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SONG OF THE LONG MARCH

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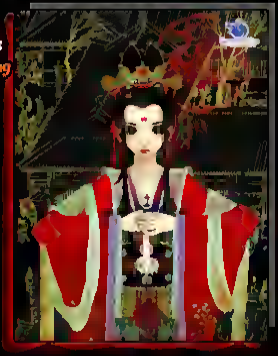

Song of the Long March 56

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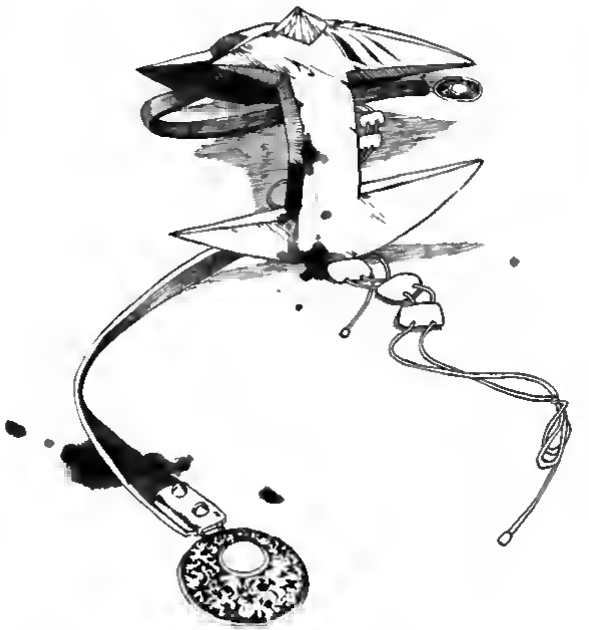
SONG OF THE LONG MARCH

<CHAPTER 56>

AUTHOR: XIA DA



WHEN I WENT TO KHITAN AS AN ENVOY...
I MET TEGIN SUN, BUT HE WAS IN DISGUISE.
HE SEEMED CLOSE WITH THE LOCALS THERE...
WHEN I ASKED THE TEGIN WHY HE WAS THERE,
HE THREATENED ME WITH THE GREAT KHAN'S NAME...
SO...
I DARED NOT PRESS THE ISSUE.

CLANG
WHY DIDN'T YOU REPORT THIS SOONER?!
EH?!
THE ARMY WAS ABOUT TO MOVE OUT,
I-I NEVER FOUND THE CHANCE.
MEN! SUMMON ASHINA SUN!
YES, KHAN!
THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT.
A CHANGE OF EAGLE-MASTER RIGHT BEFORE BATTLE IS NO SMALL MATTER.
JUST GET HIM IN HERE AND CHOP HIM TO PIECES.
THAT BRAT HAS LIVED LONG ENOUGH.
WHAT IS THERE TO BE ANGRY ABOUT?
GREAT KHAN, PLEASE CALM DOWN.

GREAT KHAN!
THOSE ON NIGHT DUTY JUST REPORTED...
GREAT KHAN, PLEASE BEAR WITH IT FOR THE MOMENT
AND DEAL WITH HIM ONLY AFTER THE BATTLE
THAT TEGIN SUN HAS ALREADY SET OFF RIDING BACK TO THE EAGLES' CAMP!
LEAVE US.
YES, SIR.

GREAT KHAN,
WE MUST AVOID FIGHTING AMONGST OUR RANKS BEFORE THE BATTLE AT ALL COSTS!
HOW MANY MEN WOULD IT TAKE IN ORDER TO WIN WITHOUT SUFFERING ANY LOSSES OF YOUR OWN?
THE EAGLES ARE COMPOSED OF EIGHT THOUSAND ELITES
SHALL I TAKE MY MEN AND CAPTURE HIM NOW?
THAT BRAT PROBABLY NOTICED SOMETHING WRONG.
SO YOU BELIEVE...
THAT WE CAN STILL AFFORD TO KEEP ASHINA SUN AND HIS EAGLES?
GREAT HAN DO YOU REMEMBER THE SCOUT'S REPORT TODAY?
AS EXPECTED THE UYGHURS AND XUEYANTUO DO NOT TRUST EACH OTHER AND HAVE PITCHED CAMP TEN LI APART.
ARE YOU NOT PLANNING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT?
A GOOD BLADE IS TO SHATTER HAVE IT SHATTER ON THE BATTLEFIELD

WHAT IS THIS?
THE PRINCESS BADE US TO PREPARE THESE IN
SHE SAID WITH THESE IN PLACE OUR ENEMIES' HORSES WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO ESCAPE ONCE THEY HAVE FALLEN INTO OUR TRAPS
SHE ALSO ORDERED US TO MAKE A SET OF HOOKED NETS
AND THE SOLDIERS HAVE ALREADY PRACTICED WITH THEM.
!!!!
THE LITTLE LASS SURE IS VICIOUS.
ELTEBER, WILL THE GREAT KHAN REALLY TRY A SNEAK ATTACK?

YES, ELTEBER. THE PREPARATIONS ARE ALMOST FINISHED.
TONIGHT, NOT ONE SOLDIER IN THIS CAMP WILL SLEEP.
IT'S VERY LIKELY.
WHEN IT'S ABOUT TIME, PUT OUT THE FIRES AND SETTLE DOWN FOR THE NIGHT
VERY GOOD.
COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS.
YI'NAN AND HIS MEN ARE SPENDING THE NIGHT SQUATTING IN THE WILDERNESS.
IF YOU WERE THE BAIT, THE GREAT KHAN WOULD DARE NOT TAKE IT
MAKES SENSE.
AND THAT PRETTY FACE DOES LOOK EASIER TO BULLY HA HA HA...
ACHOO!
ACHOO!
WHY MUST WE BE THE ONES LYING IN AMBUSH?
NO CHOICE.
YOUR FORCES ARE TOO GREAT, IRKIN...

I'M ONLY HERE TO RELAY A MILITARY ORDER...
EVERY-ONE,
WHY SO NERVOUS?
LET ME TALK TO TEGIN SUN, WILL YOU?

TEGIN,
APART FROM THE MILITARY ORDER,
THE KHAN ALSO WISHES ME TO PASS ON ANOTHER MESSAGE.
.....
A LITTLE PRIVACY, PERHAPS?

WHAT KIND OF MILITARY ORDER...
WOULD REQUIRE THE KHAN'S CHIEF STRATEGIST TO DELIVER IN PERSON?
THE KHAN HAS RECEIVED INFORMATION THAT THERE IS DISSENT BETWEEN THE UYGHURS AND XUEYANTUO, AND THAT THEY HAVE PITCHED CAMP TEN LI APART.
HE ORDERS THE EAGLES AND TIGERS, LED RESPECTIVELY BY TEGIN SUN AND SHAD* BIZHEN, TO LAUNCH A SURPRISE ATTACK ON THE UYGHUR CAMP TONIGHT.
*GC/N: SHAD IS A STATE OFFICE GIVEN TO A MEMBER OF THE RULING (ASHINA) CLAN. A SHAD RANKS HIGHER THAN A YABGU, WHO IN TURN OUTRANKS A TEGIN.
THEN...
WHAT MESSAGE DOES HE WANT YOU TO DELIVER?

TEGIN,
THE GREAT KHAN ASKS YOU NOT TO WORRY.
IF THIS BATTLE IS WON, EVERYTHING IS FORGOTTEN -
BOTH WHAT EACH OF US KNOWS AND WHAT EACH OF US DOES NOT KNOW... IT SHALL BE AS IF NO ONE KNOWS ANYTHING.
HOW ABOUT IT, TEGIN?

WE'RE MOVING OUT.
.....
PASS ON THE ORDER
LILI STILL ISN'T DONE WITH HER INSPECTION?
I HAVE ALREADY SENT SOMEONE TO ASK HER TO HURRY UP.
SHE SAID SHE'LL BE BACK VERY SOON.

I DID OVERHEAR THE ELTEBER BOASTING TO THE OTHER TRIBE LEADERS WITH PRIDE,
SAYING OUR PRINCESS IS A NATURAL AT FIGHTING WARS, AND THAT SHE IS EVERY BIT AS CLEVER AND EXPERIENCED AS THE OLD LEADERS WHO'VE SPENT YEARS ON THE BATTLEFIELD
WHY MUST HE ASK A LITTLE GIRL TO GUARD OUR HOME?
HER UNCLE HAS SO MANY MEN, ARE THEY ALL WORTHLESS?
SO HE'S SMUG NOW, HUH.
I'M BACK.
♪

CAN YOU STOP FOLLOWING ME AROUND AND JUST STAY IN THE YURT?
I'M HUNGRY!
HUNGRY?
ANY NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINE?
UNCLE'S MESSENGER SAID...
THE GREAT KHAN'S SCOUTS CAME ONE AFTER THE OTHER WITHIN A SINGLE DAY. IT SEEMS THAT HE CAN HARDLY WAIT TO JUMP INTO THE TRAP.
LILI?
...IT'S NOTHING.
Clang

I JUST HAVE A BAD FEELING FOR SOME REASON.
WE'RE HERE.
SLAUGHTERING ENEMIES IN THEIR DREAMS IS NOTHING TO BOAST ABOUT.
STILL, THEY ASKED FOR IT.

IS OUR PLAN TO KILL AT WILL OR ARE WE AIMING TO TAKE THE HEAD OF THE UYGHUR ELTEBER?
WHICH WAY ARE WE TO RETREAT ONCE WE'RE DONE? AND WILL THE GREAT KHAN'S ARMY COME TO REINFORCE US?
YOU'LL TAKE THE EAGLES AND SWEEP DOWN FROM THE NORTH. WE SHALL CATCH THEM IN A PINCER ATTACK.
...WHAT IS THE SIGNAL?
TEGIN SUN,
THIS IS A RARE CHANCE FOR YOU TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR COURAGE AND LOYALTY TO THE KHAN.
YOU AND YOUR WARRIORS HAD BETTER NOT LET IT GO TO WASTE.
BELIEVE ME, THIS IS ALSO FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR FOLLOWERS' KINSMEN BACK IN YOUR DOMAIN
THE MINUTE WE SEE YOU KILLING AND SETTING THE PLACE ON FIRE, WE SHALL BEGIN OUR ATTACK.
.....

TEGIN?
WE'LL SWEEP THROUGH THEM FROM THE NORTH!
EVERYONE, FOLLOW ME!
Clack
CHARGE!
CHARGE!

PFFT.
YOU LOT CAN TAKE YOUR TIME
CHARGE!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
AREN'T WE ATTACKING TOGETHER?
.....
WE'RE PROBABLY BEING USED AS THE PEBBLE THAT SCATTERS THE BIRDS.
THEN YOU NEED TO RUN!

WHAT ABOUT NEXT TIME, AND THE TIME AFTER THAT?
EVEN IF YOU WIN AND SURVIVE THIS BATTLE, AND THE KHAN LETS YOU OFF,
RUN!
WE'LL SAY YOU DIED IN BATTLE!
I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE

I WANT TO LIVE, BUT I ALSO WANT ALL OF YOU TO LIVE
I HAVE TO TRY, EVEN IF THERE'S ONLY A SLIVER OF HOPE
MY BROTHER,
PROMISE ME SOMETHING

SHAD BIZHEN, ARE WE STILL NOT ATTACKING?
GIVE IT A BIT MORE TIME.
THE MORE LOSSES THEY SUFFER NOW, THE EASIER IT'LL BE TO HANDLE THEM IN THE FUTURE.
SHAD BIZHEN, A GROUP OF MEN AND HORSES ARE COMING SWIFTLY FROM THE SOUTH!
THE SOUTH?
COULD IT BE THE KHAN?

AND THE EAST!!
THEY'RE COMING FROM THE WEST TOO!
IT COULD BE THE KHAN'S REINFOR-
STAY CALM!
IT'S AN AMBUSH!!!

IF XUEYANTUO DOES NOT RIDE TO THEIR RESCUE, THE UYGHURS ARE FINISHED.
AND WHEN THEY DO, WE'LL TAKE THAT CHANCE TO DESTROY THEIR CAMP.
REST ASSURED, GREAT KHAN. THIS IS THE ONLY PATH OF COMMUTE BETWEEN THE XUEYANTUO AND UYGHUR CAMPS.
AS LONG AS WE HOLD THIS, NOTHING WILL GO WRONG
IN THAT CASE, POOR SHAD BIZHEN WILL HAVE TO BE ANOTHER DISCARDED PEBBLE.
ENOUGH WITH THIS USELESS TALK.
WHAT'S THE SITUATION OVER THERE? HALF THE NIGHT HAS PASSED. WHY HAVE THERE BEEN NO REPORTS?
SHAD BIZHEN SACRIFICES HIS LIFE OUT OF LOYALTY TO THE KHAN. HIS NAME WILL LIVE ON IN GLORY.
GREAT KHAN! A REPORT FROM THE T-TIGERS!!!

TOTALLY WIPED OUT ??!!
WE DID NOT SEE THE XUEYANTUO ARMY MOBILIZE!
HOW WOULD A MERE UYGHUR ARMY BE ABLE TO...
WE'VE SOMEHOW BEEN TRICKED! GREAT KHAN PLEASE GIVE THE ORDER TO QUICKLY RETREAT TO THE MAIN CAMP!
WHAT IS THIS?! EXPLAIN CLEARLY!!!
SOMETHING IS WRONG
GREAT KHAN, HE NO LONGER BREATHES...
THIS IS PREPOSTEROUS!!!
THE TIGERS, THE EAGLES! WE DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW THEY WERE WIPED OUT!
SMASH

YES, KHAN!
GET ME MORE INFORMATION!!!
ARE YOUR HEADS THERE JUST FOR DECORATION?
LIKE I'D BE AFRAID THEY'RE COMING STRAIGHT AT ME!!
WE HAVE ALREADY TAKEN A BLOW...
GREAT KHAN, OUR MOST PRESSING CONCERN NOW IS TO COUNTER THIER ATTACK
DOO
GREAT KHAN! A REPORT FROM THE EAGLES!
THIS IS PERFECT!
GREAT KHAN!

GREAT KHAN,
IT IS A RUSE. THE UYGHURS AND XUEYUANTUO WERE WAITING IN AMBUSH ALL ALONG.
THE EAGLES WERE WIPED OUT.
TEGIN SUN, HE...
!
I KNOW,
YOU LOT CAN'T BE HAPPIER THAT HE'S DEAD.
EVEN IF IT'S A DOG,
A MASTER SHOULD AT LEAST HAVE A SLIVER OF COMPASSION FOR IT, HAVING KEPT IT FOR TWELVE YEARS!

SIGHING IN RELIEF NOW, AREN'T YOU?
I, FOR ONE, HAD RATHER DIED WITH HIM.
BUT MY TEGIN, MY BROTHER, HAD ORDERED ME TO COME BACK,
CRASH
JUST TO INFORM HIS FATHER, THE KHAN, THAT THIS IS A TRAP!

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